

Taiwan has been the focus of several developments over the past few years, including the US-Sino trade war that started in 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amid the pandemic, the government — supported by an excellent epidemic-prevention system — has kept local transmission under control. The impressive response is due to a combination of an advanced public health system and measures adopted by the central government based on advice from experts.

Last month, it was discovered that Changhua County had been conducting tests of people under quarantine who have no symptoms of the disease. This sparked public concern over the central government's position that border screenings of all arriving people were unnecessary.

However, this would have been problematic, as it would not only be costly, but would have interfered with epidemic prevention measures that are in place and possibly even aid the virus' spread.

The international plaudits heaped on Taiwan for its pandemic response have led to recent diplomatic successes. In March, the government signed the Taiwan-US Joint Statement on a Partnership against Coronavirus, reasserting the two nations' commitment to cooperation on exchanges in anti-epidemic supplies, and research and development of a vaccine.

Last month, US Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar visited Taiwan in what was the highest-level visit by a US official to Taiwan since Washington broke off diplomatic relations. Azar voiced the US' desire to boost bilateral cooperation.

Moreover, the American Institute in Taiwan in the past few days has issued statements commending the good relations between the two nations.

Taiwan is caught in the middle of the trade conflict between the US and China, and major developments are coming thick and fast. Only last week, Asia's first approved maintenance

center for F-16 jets was inaugurated in Taichung, reinforcing Taiwan's national security; Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced his resignation after nearly eight years in the job, potentially altering the relationship between Japan and the US; Google and Facebook, amid concerns about China, announced that they were ditching a plan to dock a giant data cable in Hong Kong, refiling the undersea project for Taiwan or the Philippines instead, demonstrating the benefits and weaknesses of being affiliated with a democratic or totalitarian government; and on Friday last week, the Council of Grand Justices ruled that provisions of the Act Governing the Settlement of Ill-gotten Properties by Political Parties and Their Affiliate Organizations (黨產條例) were constitutional, adding to the travails of the beleaguered Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) while boosting Taiwan's hopes of implementing transitional justice according to the rule of law.

All of this has added to Taiwan's ability to reinforce its sovereignty in the international community, while calling state property thieves to account at home.

Naturally, the contentious issue of US beef and pork imports in the ongoing talks over a Taiwan-US trade agreement has caused something of a stink. President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Friday last week announced that the government is to allow the imports, based on considerations of national interest and strategic development goals.

There is no such thing as a free lunch in international relations — something has to be given to show good faith.

However, at the same time as pulling out all the stops to promote multilateral trade relations, the government also has to consider how it is to bring the public along and assuage their concerns by communicating in an open and honest way. Only then can it maintain a steady foothold at home during turbulent times internationally.

The government must put Taiwanese first and foremost, and not lose sight of its core mission.

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Taiwanese first as world beckons

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